

## Crew Coordination Equals Battlefield Success

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**Technological advancements continue to provide today's Soldiers with greater capabilities than ever before. Armor enhancements, ballistic glass and additional mission equipment in Army vehicles all offer extra protection on the battlefield. However, these advancements have come at a price for vehicle crews who've had to cope with restricted outside visibility and altered vehicle handling. As the Army continues to improve and upgrade its combat vehicles, the need for effective crew coordination and communication has become essential for crews to safely complete their missions.**

Army Aviation has long used aircrew coordination, a system that improves an aircrew's interaction and efficiency, in safely accomplishing their missions. This time-proven program reduces accidents and improves the effectiveness of crews in both peace and wartime. The good news is this system is easily transferable to Army vehicles and can equally benefit ground crews.

### **Basic qualities of effective crews**

Effective vehicle crews are made up of assertive crewmembers who provide input to the vehicle commander. Every crewmember knows he or she is a part of the team and is willing to help without being asked. The entire crew acts as a team in mission planning, execution and after-action reviews and, with the exception of short-notice missions or high-workload conditions, analyzes information and contributes to decisions.

Vehicle commanders establish an open, professional climate at the beginning of every mission. Effective crews maintain this atmosphere by communicating vital information in a clear, timely manner so conditions, actions and decisions are clearly understood. Finally, effective crews view AARs as learning experiences that can enhance future crew performance.

Some good crews do these things without having a background in crew coordination training. They intuitively know they need to have open communications, provide professional input and work as a team in support of the vehicle commander.

### **Crew coordination objectives**

The aviation crew coordination system has five main objectives that can be observed, sensed and measured. These objectives also can be applied to ground vehicles:

- Establishing and maintaining team relationships. Vehicle commanders create an open crew climate and maintain it throughout the mission. Good vehicle commanders use their authority, but don't operate without input from the rest of the crew.
- Mission planning and rehearsals. Pre-mission tasks, inspections and checks are completed by the crew. The crew discusses and thinks through contingencies like rollovers, fires, casualties and actions on contact.
- Establish and maintain workload levels. Actions are prioritized and workloads distributed equally or in a way that makes the best sense.
- Exchange mission information. Crews send information in a clear, timely and complete way.
- Cross-monitor performance. Crewmembers mutually cross monitor each other to ensure tasks get done and to enhance crew situational awareness.



## Crew coordination elements

The aviation model also defines basic crew coordination elements as things that individuals in a vehicle crew can do to enhance overall crew effectiveness. Explanations and examples of each for vehicle crews are as follows:

- Communicate positively. Positive crew communication ensures the message gets through.
- Direct assistance. Vehicle crews should direct assistance when they need it.
- Announce actions. Announcing actions ensures everyone is aware of what is happening.
- Offer assistance. Offering assistance to a crewmember who is especially busy or needs help benefits the whole crew and is something all should be prepared to do without being asked.
- Acknowledge actions. Acknowledging actions ensures those taking them know that everyone is aware. A "Roger" callout may be all that is needed and maintains crew situational awareness.
- Be clear and precise. Using plain or standardized terms and avoiding slang ensures everyone understands what you're saying. Ambiguous words or phrases like "I have it" or "Right" can have more than one meaning and bring about an incorrect response.
- Provide vehicle control and hazard advisories. All crewmembers should be prepared to assist the driver in avoiding road hazards, traffic, canal edges or other things they may not see due to the reduced visibility in up-armored Army Motor Vehicles and Army Combat Vehicles.
- Coordinate action sequence and timing so crew actions mesh. Sequencing actions and timing can be critical during weapons engagements, loading of ammunition, turret movements and while maneuvering the vehicle in combat.

## Standard crew terminology

Standardized words and phrases, such as those used in radio transmissions, help crews avoid confusion and allow them to react more quickly and efficiently. Using words known by everyone in the crew also prevents them from having to be repeated. If the operator's manuals have a standard callout or term for a piece of equipment, get in the habit of using it, especially if a new crewmember joins the team. If someone doesn't understand what you said, try saying it another way or in clearer terms instead of repeating it multiple times or raising your voice.

## Situational awareness

To ensure the whole crew maintains situational awareness, keep an open flow of information. Also, keep chatter or non-relevant conversations to a minimum. Conversations should be limited to mission-focused communications during critical times or events. The vehicle's intercom system should be used to enhance crew communications and checked prior to the mission to ensure it works. Be sure to clarify if what you said is not understood. Likewise, ask other crewmembers if you don't know what was said or is happening.

Crew coordination is more of an art than science and requires continuous practice. Good crews constantly work on improving their coordination and use AARs as a forum for future crew improvement. These combat-proven techniques can help you better accomplish your missions and prevent accidents. Discuss these methods with your crew and practice them on every mission. I think you'll be glad you did.

**FYI---Improved Commander's Corner Tool Available. The Commander's Corner Web site has recently been revised to give leaders at every level a single page providing quick and easy access to vital safety information. The site's goal is to help leaders implement Composite Risk Management processes to help keep their Soldiers in the fight and preserve the combat power of their formations. For more information on Commander's Corner, visit the USACRC Web site at <https://crc.army.mil/commanderscorner/> or call 334-255-2381.**

